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Critically Understanding the Media: A Lesson from a *Time for Kids* Reporter



Seventh and eighth graders had the opportunity to interview a *Time for Kids* reporter, Rebecca Katzman, via Skype. Ms. Katzman works for the kids' publication division of Time Inc. in New York. This lesson was part of the students' recent novel study. The seventh and eighth grade just finished the novel *Nothing But the Truth*. This book is about a high school student's disturbance in class during the national anthem, and in the book, this disturbance creates quite the story in the media.

Throughout the novel, students looked at the role reporters and the media play in telling stories and also how the news is crafted. Through our Skype lesson with Ms. Katzman, students learned about her work as a journalist and also the skills she needs to be successful in her role. After reading *Nothing But the Truth*, the students were especially interested in how Ms. Katzman avoids bias in her writing. Students even read one of her articles about the election in preparation and asked Ms. Katzman about how professionally she deals with not letting her personal opinions influence her writing. Ms. Katzman talked to the students about recognizing the bias that is present in news. For example, she explained that some news articles might be sponsored by a group or company, and words like "sponsored by" are

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important to notice. Ms. Katzman also explained to our students that she has to cite her sources when she writes, and for our students, who are very familiar with citing their sources, it was exciting to hear that real reporters do this as well.

For our final question, seventh grader Elad asked, "How is writing an article different from writing a paper?" Rebecca explained that language is more direct in news articles, and this was another way for our students to learn that professionals adapt their writing styles for different audiences, just like our students have to do in class!

As our students continue to study current events and read novels that relate to contemporary issues, we are so pleased they had a lesson in dissecting bias and the "ins and outs" of reporting from a person in the field!